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ABSTRACT

This paper briefly summarizes the validation and implementation of three CLEP examinations (humanities, social science/history, and natural sciences) that complement the placement and proficiency system of the University of Illinois. Three groups of juniors in fall 1971 who had completed specific distributional sequences that had satisfied general educational requirements in the areas of humanities, social sciences/history, and natural sciences, were administered the appropriate CLEP general exam. Cutoff scores were established providing a framework for granting 6 hours of credit in a particular area of the naive student's score who had received an average grade of A. Three hours of credit and a waiver of the requirements had to be comparable to a junior's whose average grade was B. Institutions choosing to utilize CLEP examinations are encouraged to conduct validity studies on their own students and courses to determine the appropriate cutoff levels for credit, waiver and/or placement decisions. Related document is HE 004 548. (MJM)

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The University of Illinois', Urbana-Champaign Campus,
Placement and Proficiency System and the CLEP Addition¹

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Freshmen entering any institution of higher education will exhibit a wide variety of achievement levels in numerous subject matter areas. In order to place them into an instructional program which will most adequately fit them into a particular stream of subject matter study, the necessity of a placement examination system is crucial. The objective of such a placement scheme should be to see that students are assigned to courses consonant with their achievement and ability and also to provide instructors with a more homogeneous grouping of students in their classes.

The Placement and Proficiency System of the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign as described by Aleamoni and Spencer (1968), Stallings, Aleamoni and Heil (1972), and Aleamoni (1973), has been functioning well for over six years. The main reasons for establishing this system were to:

- (a) promote good student attitudes towards courses into which they were placed;
- (b) enable students, by more homogeneous grouping, to perform near their maximum capability;
- (c) reduce the instructor's burden by generating relatively homogeneous ability groupings in courses; and
- (d) encourage students to begin advanced work at an earlier period in their academic careers.

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The University of Illinois' Placement and Proficiency System contains examinations in the following subject areas: (a) English Composition; (b) Chemistry; (c) Intermediate Mathematics; (d) Advanced Mathematics; (e) Biology; (f) Latin; (g) French; (h) German; (i) Russian; and (j) Spanish. In all areas but Chemistry and Mathematics, the examinations are used for both placement and proficiency decisions. For Chemistry and Mathematics, they are used for placement decisions only. All of these examinations are used to make judgments relative to specific courses and not general curricular offerings.

About three years ago, the Measurement and Research Division (MARD) of the Office of Instructional Resources began conducting validity studies on the College Level Examination Program (CLEP) examinations to see if these examinations could complement the existing placement and proficiency system as well as the Advanced Placement Program tests and departmental proficiency examinations. Trial administrations of the CLEP Humanities, Social Sciences/History, Natural Sciences, American History, Accountancy, Introductory Calculus, General Chemistry, and Introductory Economics examinations were conducted. Some of these trial administrations were conducted on a pre-post basis in order to see if the examinations were sensitive to course influences or if the course influenced. These considerations are important if one is to rely on an examination to properly indicate appropriate course achievement. Also, if an instructor doubts the appropriateness of an examination to his/her course then a pre-post test analysis could help to quell such doubts.

Although some progress has been made in validating and implementing particular subject examinations, this paper will briefly summarize the validation and implementation of three CLEP general examinations (Humanities, Social Sciences/History, and Natural Sciences). The validation of the CLEP general examinations was not as easy or as clean as the validation of the examinations in the traditional placement and proficiency system as more than one course comprises the content of a CLEP general examination. Therefore, with the cooperation of the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences, MARD selected three groups of juniors in fall, 1971 who had completed specific distributional sequences that satisfied general educational requirements in the areas of Humanities, Social Sciences/History, Biological Science, and Physical Science and administered them the appropriate CLEP general examination. The scores obtained on the CLEP examinations were then compared to the grades the juniors had received in the courses they had selected to complete the general educational requirement. Cut-off scores were then established providing a framework for granting six hours of credit in a particular area if the naive student's score was comparable to a junior's score who had received an average grade of A in the courses making up that area. In order to get three hours of credit and a waiver of the requirement a naive student's score had to be comparable to a junior's whose average grade was a B in the courses making up a particular area.

One may cautiously ask: Is all of this validation necessary for examinations in general areas? We thought that it was since the mean performance of

our entering freshmen on the CLEP general examinations was approximately at the 68th percentile of the national sophomore norms provided by Educational Testing Service. This means that if we had assumed that our students were representative of the national sample, we might have used cut-off scores (unvalidated) similar to other institutions and thereby granted a disproportionately large number of credit hours. It is much more educationally sound to encourage each institution choosing to utilize CLEP examinations to conduct validity studies on their own students and courses to determine the appropriate cut-off levels for credit, waiver, and/or placement decisions. The decisions arrived at in this fashion would then be defensible in terms of equivalent course or sequence credit as reported on college student transcripts.

Students entering the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign in the past few years have been able to earn approximately 27,000 proficiency credit hours each year. The introduction of the CLEP examinations will enlarge that figure. However, the real benefit of such a system of credit by examination or proficiency testing is that it can introduce flexibility into higher education by: (a) permitting students to graduate in less than the traditional four years; (b) allowing students to obtain credit for knowledge acquired outside of college classrooms; (c) providing alternate tracks for students to satisfy course and program requirements; (d) affording students the opportunity to pursue major areas in greater depth, to explore new academic subjects, and perhaps to earn a double degree--all through the "released time" gained by proficiency credit.

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